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necessary, a transmitting/receiving portion 12 for communicating with the bulletin board server, a bulletin board screen generating portion 13 for generating the bulletin board screen based on the received message, and a display portion 14 for displaying the screen upon receiving the output from screen generating portion 13. Display portion 14 is a normal display for personal computers or a large display module to be viewed by passers-by on the street. Central server 1 further comprises a transmitting/receiving portion 15 for communicating with a mobile information terminal, a bulletin board retrieving portion 16 for receiving an access request to the bulletin board server from the mobile information terminal and transmitting access information (e.g., the URL) on the most preferred bulletin board server within the communication zone of the mobile information terminal, and a zone/bulletin board server database 17 for storing the relation between the communication zone and the bulletin board server in advance.

Message board server 2 comprises a transmitting/receiving portion 21 for communicating with the central server, a message generating portion 22 for generating a transmission message, a bulletin board screen generating portion 23 for receiving the transmission message from message generating portion 22 and receiving the received message from transmitting/receiving portion 21 and displaying both messages on the bulletin board, and a display portion 24 for displaying a screen upon receiving the output from screen generating portion 23. Display portion 24 may be a large display module to be viewed by passers-by on the street. Message board server 2 further comprises a transmitting/receiving portion 25 for communicating with the mobile information terminal and an input portion 26 for receiving input of a message by a user. Message board server 2 receives the message from the mobile information terminal and/or input portion 26 and generates an icon, relates the message with the icon, and displays the icon on display portion 24. Message board server 2 exchanges messages with central server 1, so the contents

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of the bulletin board displayed on display portion 24 are equal to that of display portion 14.

It is also possible to provide the mobile information terminal with some of the functions of bulletin board server 2, for example the functions from transmitting/receiving portion 21 to input portion 26 with exception of transmitting/receiving portion 25. This structure enables display of a screen equal to that of the display screen provided by bulletin board server 2 on the mobile information terminal. In other words, a bulletin board can be displayed on the screen of the mobile information terminal.

Fig. 2 is a conceptual view of the overall structure of the present system. Message board servers 2a, 2b can access central server 1 via the Internet/Intranet 3. Server 1 stores application software for this system (Java applet) in advance in external storage device 1a. When bulletin board server 2 or any other client accesses the server, application software for clients is downloaded to enable utilization of this system.

An access server 4 enabling mobile information terminals 6a, 6b to access the Internet is also connected to the Internet. Mobile information terminals 6a, 6b communicate with radio base station sites 5a, 5b to access bulletin board servers 2a, 2b and central server 1 via access server 4 and the Internet 3.

Fig. 3 is a view explaining the procedure of using the electronic bulletin board system relating to an embodiment of the present invention. Screen 100 provided by bulletin board server 2 contains a public area 101 and a private area 102. Public area 101 is an area for displaying messages addressed to the general public, and messages placed within this area can be read by anyone. Cases are distinguished where the message contents are displayed on screen 100, and where the existence of a message is displayed but not the contents, in which case the user downloads

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the message as necessary onto the mobile information terminal to display the message onto the screen of the own mobile information terminal. The second case is called an icon message, or simply, an icon. Private area 102 is an area displaying an icon message for a specific addressee, and the contents of the icon message placed within this area can be read only by the specified addressee. Furthermore, screen 100 also displays an advertisement 103 and a bulletin board access method 104. As an example of access method 104, the URL of central server 1 may be displayed.

The user of bulletin board 100 must first prepare a message and transmit it to bulletin board server 2. At this time, the user also selects either public area 101 or private area 102 to place the message. When placing a message in private area 102, identification information for specifying the receiver and authentication information are transmitted together with the message to bulletin board server 2. The identification information and authentication information may be, for example, the number of the addressee's cellular phone or the name of the receiver. Both identification and authentication information are displayed together with the message.

In Fig. 3, a user (sender) P1 transmits a message 3. Message 3 in Fig. 3 is displayed in public area 101 and the contents are also displayed. The person P2 addressed by user P1 can read the message without any special operation. In this way, public area 101 can also be used for communication of private messages. Public area 101 is for displaying a message intended for the general public. In contrast, private area 102 is for communicating a message only to a specific person by using the security function of this area.

In Fig. 3, user (sender) P1 transmits a message 4. An icon of message 4 in Fig. 3 is displayed in private area 102, and the contents are not displayed. Person P2 addressed by user P1